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2013-06-11 -Satpanth -by W. Ivanow (451)

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PANTH.

By W. Ivanow

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Satpanth, really Sat Panth, i.e. the "True Path (to Salvation)", is the name of a sect of Islam, forming a transition from ordinary Islamic doctrine of the Shi 'ite type, to Hinduism. The Shi 'ite element in is represented by the Nizari form of Ismailism of the post-Alamût period in Persia, and Hinduism by the , chiefly, Tantric aspects of that religious system. At present it is divided into two main branches: the Khojas who are the followers of His Highness the Aga Khan, and the Satpanthis who follow the *Pir's* who are the descendants of Imam Shâh (d. in the first quarter of the tenth/sixteenth c.). The Satpanthis are divided into several groups paying allegiance to the different branches of the *Pir's* family. In addition, various sections of the community show, different tendencies. The majority of the Khoja community continues its traditional tendency of giving preponderance to Islamic elements at the expense of the Hinduistic, while in the Imam-shahi branches certain groups may pursue just the opposite course of drifting back to Hinduism. Moreover, there is a general tendency on the part of the leading strata of the Imam-shahi community, especially their *Pir's* , to disclaim all connection with Ismailism, however untenable such position may appear from a historical point of view. In Gujarat the Sayyids, i.e. descendants of Imâm Shâh, would claim they and their ancestors are Ithna-'asharis, while the Sayyids of Khandesh prefer to be, with their ancestors, pure Sunnites of the most orthodox complexion.

Satpanth by no means presents an exceptional phenomenon in Indian life in the sense of being a synthesis of Islam and Hinduism. As is well-known, the symbiosis of both these cultures and religions has produced a great variety of different forms of mutual influence. In many parts of India where the Muslim and Hindu population is in contact with each other, the lower classes of the Hindus take great interest in various Muslim shrines, saints and ceremonies, especially those of Muharram. There are even widespread Hindu-Muslim sects, such as the Panj-Piriyya, Haft-pîriyya, and others. On the other hand, especially in the East, in Bengal, Muslim peasants not uncommonly worship Hindu deities, such as Kali, etc., side by side with Allah. I remember reading in newspapers a case before a court in which a Muslim fisherman was sentenced for having immolated his own son before Kali in order to increase the catch of fish.

In my note, "The Sect of Imam Shah in Gujarat", published in 1936 (I.B.B.R.A.S., pp. 19-70), I have given in detail all that I could collect concerning the Satpanth of the Imam-shahi branch, touching only incidentally on the earlier history of the community before the split, and on the evolution of its doctrine. This was done because the literature that was accessible to me at the time was entirely of Islamic origin, and its authors could not claim much authority to speak on matters of doctrine. Not being an Indologist myself, I was unable to refer to the original *gnan* $$1 literature which requires expert knowledge of several Indian languages. Now, owing to the valuable cooperation of the newly founded "Ismaili Society", I am in a better position to approach the question. A representative selection of either whole works or extracts has been translated into English by a Khoja specialist, Mr. V.N. Hooda, as published further here. This, though forming only a small portion of the whole Satpanth literature, nevertheless, supplies sufficient materials to permit us to assess its general outlines, and arrive at some conclusions. As far as I know, this is the first occasion on which translations from the original *gnan* literature have been published. I hope students may share my impression that it is well worth studying for the interesting implications which it reveals in relation to the cultural evolution of India.

My activities with regard to the translations made by Mr. V. N. Hooda were confined to a limited degree of editing, and the addition of explanatory notes. The general atmosphere of that strange world which the *gnan* literature reveals, with its outlook, technical terms, mythology, and so forth, may appear so alien to the ordinary Islamic student as to be entirely unintelligible. To obviate the necessity of inserting lengthy

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SATPANTH.

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By W. Ivanow

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footnotes, I thought it better to arrange the material which should go to such explanatory notes into a separate paper of introductory nature, which I offer here, leaving only minor matters to be dealt with on the spot. I must emphasise my desire that readers should not take this paper as an attempt to sum up the subject of Satpanth in its entirety. This would obviously be possible only when its literature is thoroughly studied. Although various matters of a general nature had perforce to be touched upon, this paper is nothing more than it professes to be, namely, notes helping to approach the specimens which have been translated.

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An important point should be properly noted. In my analysis of various elements of the Satpanth system I had to proceed according to the usual critical methods applicable to such kinds of study, regardless of tradition. It is an indisputable fact that religious tradition generally is very little concerned with historical reliability, seeking in the past only for instructive examples, or vindicating certain religious or moral principles. This particularly applies to Satpanth with its Hînduistic basis. The Indian mind is notoriously unhistoric, and it's polymeric and syncretic perception is aggravated by intense hyperbolism in expression.

It does not care for single years or decades, and measures the past by figures that are usually called "astronomical". All this, together with all the miracles which are narrated here, belong to the sphere of belief, of religious legend, not history. For those who have been brought up in this tradition such miracle stories may have great religious and sentimental value, but it should be realized that we here deal with that which may be abstracted from this in the way of plain and ordinary historical events. I therefore offer my profound apologies to those for whom the legends may be dear. Also I must warn every reader that opinions here expressed are my personal, W. Ivanow's, opinions and ideas for which neither the Satpanth community as a whole, nor its authorities individually are in the least responsible. I unhesitatingly admit the possibility of many of these ideas being ultimately proved erroneous, based as they are on my imperfect knowledge of the subject. I have to acknowledge my feelings of profound gratitude to all those my Ismaili friends who offered me their friendly advice and collaboration in the compilation of this note.

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